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AN ANALYSIS UPON CULTURAL ASPECTS OF ARTS IN INDIAN SUBCONTINENT

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An Analysis upon Cultural Aspects of Arts in Indian Subcontinent

Mohan Shyam Bhaskar

Research Scholar, Bundelkhand University, Jhansi, UP

Abstract – The cultural evolution of India during the British period. "Culture" is a difficult word to define, but I have taken it in the broadest sense, to include all those movements which have to do with a people's mind and its social organisation. Manners and morals, journalism and literature, education and public life, the transformation of religious and social ideas, economics, art and industry, and finally, politics in so far as they deal with formative ideas rather than controversial facts, will all claim our attention. But all these matters must be placed in due proportion. Here we are not writing political or literary or religious or social history, or the history of education or journalism, art, economics, or industry. We are taking a bird's-eye view of the forces which are moulding our culture.

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INTRODUCTION

Before partition in 1947, the Indian subcontinent includes Pakistan, India and Bangladesh; today, the three independent countries and nations. This Indian Subcontinent has a history of some five millennium years and was spread over the area of one and a half millions of square miles (Swarup, 1968). The region is rich in natural as well as physical beauty. It has mountains, plains, forests, deserts, lakes, hills, and rivers with different climate and seasons throughout the year. This natural beauty has deep influence on the culture and life style of the people of the region.

This land has been an object of invasion either from the route of mountains or the sea, bringing with it the new masses and ideas and assimilating and changing the culture of the people. The invaders were the Aryans, the Dravidians, the Parthians, the Greeks, the Sakas, the Kushans, the Huns, the Turks, the Afghans, and the Mongols (Singh, 2008) who all brought their unique cultures with them and the amalgamation gave rise to a new Indian Civilization.

The culture of India is the way of living of the people of India. India's languages, religions, dance, music, architecture, food, and customs differ from place to place within the country. The Indian culture, often labeled as an amalgamation of several cultures, spans across the Indian subcontinent and has been influenced by a history that is several millennia old. Many elements of India's diverse cultures, such as Indian religions, yoga and Indian cuisine, have had a profound impact across the world.

India's diversity has inspired many writers to pen their perceptions of the country's culture. These writings

paint a complex and often conflicting picture of the culture of India.

According to industry consultant Eugene M. Makar, for example, traditional Indian culture is defined by a relatively strict social hierarchy. He also mentions that from an early age, children are reminded of their roles and places in society. This is reinforced, Makar notes, by the way many believe gods and spirits have an integral and functional role in determining their life. Several differences such as religion divide the culture. However, a far more powerful division is the traditional Hindu bifurcation into non-polluting and polluting occupations. Strict social taboos have governed these groups for thousands of years, claims Makar. In recent years, particularly in cities, some of these lines have blurred and sometimes even disappeared. He writes important family relations extend as far as gotra, the mainly patrilinear lineage or clan assigned to a Hindu at birth. In rural areas & sometimes in urban areas as well, it is common that three or four generations of the family live under the same roof. The patriarch often resolves family issues.

Others have a different perception of Indian culture. According to an interview with C.K. Prahalad by Des Dearlove, author of many bestselling business books, modern India is a country of very diverse cultures with many languages, religions and traditions. Children begin by coping and learning to accept and assimilate in this diversity. Prahalad - who was born in India and grew up there - claimed, in the interview, that Indians, like everyone else in the world, want to be treated as unique, as individuals, want to express themselves and seek innovation. In another report, Nancy Lockwood of Society for Human Resource Management, the world's largest human resources

association with members in 140 countries, writes that in the past two decades or so, social change in India is in dramatic contrast to the expectations from traditional Indian culture. These changes have led to Indian families giving education opportunities to girls, accepting women working outside home, pursuing a career, and opening the possibility for women to attain managerial roles in corporate India. Lockwood claims that change is slow, yet the scale of cultural change can be sensed from the fact that of India's 397 million workers, 124 million are now women. The issues in India with women empowerment are similar to those elsewhere in the world.

Indian art is the term commonly used to designate the art of the Indian subcontinent, which includes the present political divisions of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Although a relationship between political history and the history of Indian art before the advent of Islam is at best problematical, a brief review will provide a broad context. The earliest urban culture of the subcontinent is represented by the Indus Valley civilization, which possessed several flourishing cities not only in the Indus Valley but also in Gujarat and Rajasthan. The circumstances in which this culture came to an end are obscure. Although there is no clear proof of historical continuity, scholars have noticed several striking similarities between this early culture and features of later Indian civilization.

ART IN INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION

The history of Indian subcontinent starts with the Indus Valley Civilization and the coming of Aryans both are known as Pre-Vedic and Vedic periods.

The Indus River Civilization dates back to 2300 – 1750 BC and had two main cities; Harappa in western Punjab and Mohenjo-Daro on the lower Indus in Sindh – now the two important provinces of Pakistan. Both cities were urban grain growing civilizations and were believed to have run by Aryans who came from Iran (Mcintosh, 2008).

Sculpture: The statues found at the sites include both human and animal forms with intricacies and finest details. Some seals were found engraved with figures and motifs also. All these things were made with limestone, bronze, stone and terracotta (Pal, 1988).

Architecture: The Harappa and Mohenjo Daro sites show the great architecture patterns of the time. The Houses were made of baked bricks, the drains and bathrooms were also laid down by bricks. There was a proper drainage system from the houses to the central drain. The houses were double storey with the ground floor made of bricks and the upper storey of wood. There was a public bath site found that could have been used for religious motives. Thus the cities were scientifically laid down. The construction of the houses was luxurious with bathrooms, upper story, wells, assembly halls, granaries, barracks and workshops. There were market places and beautiful personal

ornaments found there. The gold, silver, lead, copper, tin alloys, precious stones, cotton and wool had been in use by the inhabitants and the domestic animals like buffalo, sheep, elephant, bull and camel were present in the households (Mcintosh, 2008).

Dance: In Harappa, a torso of a dancing girl was found which shows that dance as an art was present there. The musical instruments of that time found in the history are flute and drum. (Mcintosh, 2008).

Effects of culture on intercultural relations: There is evidence of cultural relationships of Indus valley civilization with other communities like the similar items are found in Mesopotamia (Mcintosh, 2008).

INDIAN ART AND RELIGION

Indian art is religious inasmuch as it is largely dedicated to the service of one of several great religions. It may be didactic or edificatory as is the relief sculpture of the two centuries before and after Christ; or, by representing the divinity in symbolic form (whether architectural or figural), its purpose may be to induce contemplation and thereby put the worshipper in communication with the divine. Not all Indian art, however, is purely religious, and some of it is only nominally so. There were periods when humanistic currents flowed strongly under the guise of edificatory or contemplative imagery, the art inspired by and delighting in the life of this world. (see also Index: religious art, iconography) Although Indian art is religious, there is no such thing as a sectarian Hindu or Buddhist art, for style is a function of time and place and not of religion. Thus it is not strictly correct to speak of Hindu or Buddhist art, but, rather, of Indian art that happens to render Hindu or Buddhist themes. For example, an image of Vishnu and an image of Buddha of the same period are stylistically the same, religion having little to do with the mode of artistic expression. Nor should this be surprising in view of the fact that the artists belonged to nondenominational guilds, ready to lend their services to any patron, whether Hindu, Buddhist, or Jaina.

The religious nature of Indian art accounts to some extent for its essentially symbolic and abstract nature. It scrupulously avoids illusionistic effects, evoked by imitation of the physical and ephemeral world of the senses; instead, objects are made in imitation of ideal, divine prototypes, whose source is the inner world of the mind. This attitude may account for the relative absence of portraiture and for the fact that, even when it is attempted, the emphasis is on the ideal person behind the human lineaments rather than on the physical likeness.

BRITISH IMPACT ON SOCIETY AND CULTURE

Indian society underwent many changes after the British came to India. In the 19th century, certain social practices like female infanticide, child marriage, sati, polygamy and a rigid caste system became more

prevalent. These practices were against human dignity and values. Women were discriminated against at all stages of life and were the disadvantaged section of the society. They did not have access to any development opportunities to improve their status. Education was limited to a handful of men belonging to the upper castes. Brahmins had access to the Vedas which were written in Sanskrit. Expensive rituals, sacrifices and practices after birth or death were outlined by the priestly class.

When the British came to India, they brought new ideas such as liberty, equality, freedom and human rights from the Renaissance, the Reformation Movement and the various revolutions that took place in Europe. These ideas appealed to some sections of our society and led to several reform movements in different parts of the country. At the forefront of these movements were visionary Indians such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, Aruna Asaf Ali and Pandita Ramabai.

These movements looked for social unity and strived towards liberty, equality and fraternity. Many legal measures were introduced to improve the status of women. For example, the practice of sati was banned in 1829 by Lord Bentinck, the then Governor General. Widow Remarriage was permitted by a law passed in 1856. A law passed in 1872, sanctioned inter-caste and inter-communal marriages. Sharda Act was passed in 1929 preventing child marriage. The act provided that it was illegal to marry a girl below 14 and a boy below 18 years. All the movements severely criticized the caste system and especially the practice of untouchability.

CONCLUSION

The art of Indian subcontinent is idealistic in nature with strong traces of different cultures and civilizations in it. It is evident from the history that the cultural diplomats in the region were the invaders, warriors that brought the cultural diffusion through hard power but along with them there were a great number of soft power promoters as artists, suifs, poets, musicians, and story tellers. The role of these cultural diplomats was significant in contributing to the better socio-cultural understanding and building relationship between people of different faiths, sects and regions.

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